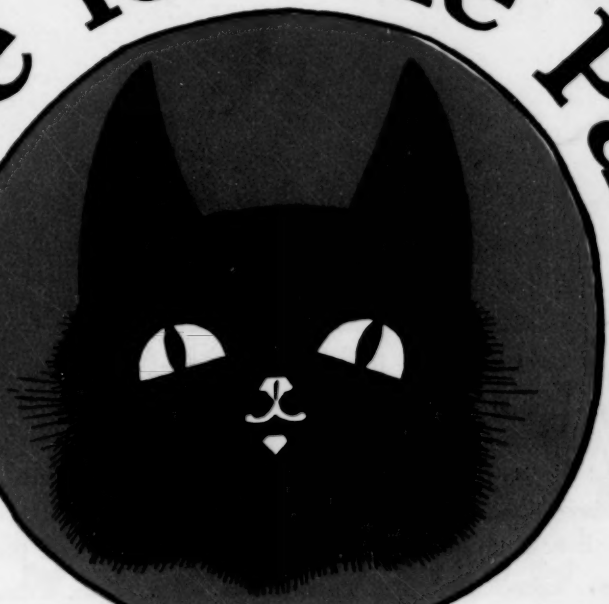
The Black Cat

APR 26 1905

A Wife for the Pastor



MAY 1905

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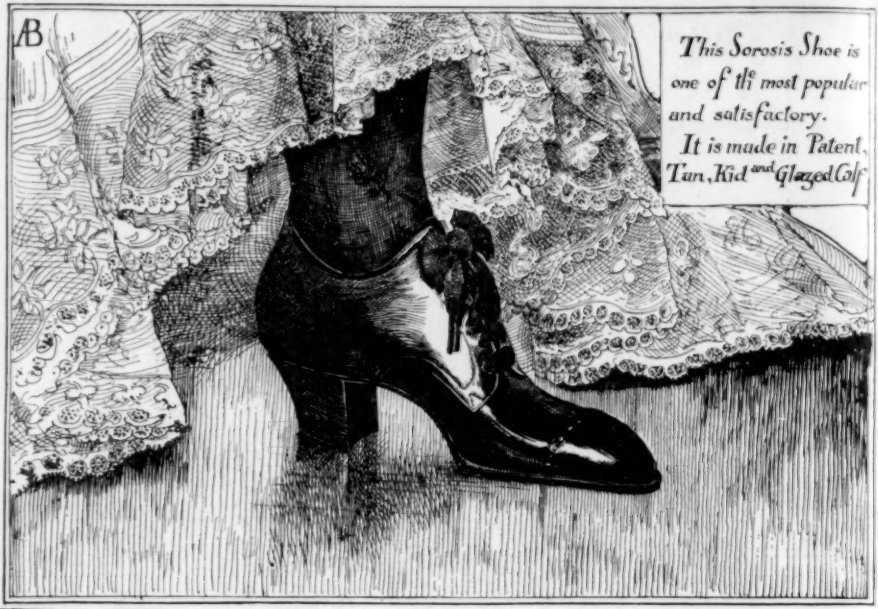

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A Wife for the Pastor.*

BY CHAPIN HOWARD.

WHEN the Rev. Gilbert Bancroft began his pastorate in Windham, it was felt by the members of the village church that they had secured all — in fact a great deal more — than they had any reason to expect. They had treated themselves to the pleasurable excitement of listening to a long line of candidates, considering and rejecting, until one Sunday morning a slim young preacher had arisen in the pulpit and surveyed them earnestly with a pair of very fine gray eyes.

His frock coat fitted perfectly, his collar and tie were irreproachable, and as it had been previously ascertained that he was hampered by neither a family nor a cough, an instantaneous conviction swept through the feminine half of the audience that here, at last, was the man for whom they had been waiting. In a few isolated cases of spinsterhood this conviction even assumed a more personal significance.

The more conservative, masculine part of the congregation waited for the sermon before committing itself to a decision — happily unconscious that it was taking an entirely unnecessary

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* The writer of this story received a cash prize of $150 in THE BLACK CAT story contest ending October 12, 1904.

precaution, and that the candidate had been engaged practically from the first moment. Before the singing of the second hymn, Mrs. Saxton, the wife of one of the deacons, was already congratulating herself on the fact that her daughter, Milly, sitting unsuspectingly at her side, had always been carefully reared, and was fitted in every way to take up the duties of a minister's wife. The parsonage roof, of course, would have to be repaired, and she would insist upon the Ladies' Society re-papering the parlor; otherwise, the house would do very well as it was.

At the close of service, by skilful manœuvering and from the vantage of a front pew, the Deacon's wife secured a promise from the candidate to take tea with her during the first week of his pastorate, and her invitation was only the first in a royal salute of welcome which rained upon him from all the tea-tables in the village, as soon as it was definitely known that he would accept the call extended to him by the church.

The parsonage was a low-roofed, pleasant-looking white house, standing well back from the street, on a gentle rise of lawn, and protected from the too close scrutiny of its neighbors by a baffling hedge of locust trees and shrubbery. Here, in the library, on the south side of the house, young Mr. Bancroft established himself with his typewriter and his books, scattering through the other rooms his scanty supply of furniture, the somewhat battered equipment of his seminary days. He engaged, as housekeeper, Mrs. Emily Kimbal, an elderly widow of his congregation, and she at once assumed a motherly charge of the minister and his affairs.

She was inclined to view rather skeptically the frank outburst of cordiality with which the ladies of the congregation sought to make their new pastor feel at home. He, however, accepted all his invitations courteously, starting out every afternoon punctually at half-past five, faultlessly attired in clothes of a noticeably city cut, his fine, abstracted gaze unconscious of the admiring scrutiny of half the village. Mrs. Kimbal never failed to observe him critically from the shelter of the parlor blinds.

"My land!" she remarked scornfully to herself, "Anyone would think they was tryin' ter pay for the spiritual food they get on Sunday by feedin' him up on cake an' preserves all through

the week. An' when they can't ask him out, they're a-sendin' of things in. There's enough jell an' spice-cake in the pantry now to keep him for a year. First they know they'll ruin his digestion an' then they'll have him preachin' Hell-fire an' damnation at 'em fit to kill!"

It was true that everything feminine ingenuity could devise had been showered upon the young clergyman to relieve the supposed barrenness of his existence. And from endless culinary delicacies he found himself the possessor of a bewildering array of Bible-markers, embroidered slippers, and sofa-cushions, all of which he gave over into his housekeeper's charge with a rather helpless air. He regarded them simply as well-meant expressions of friendliness and good-will on the part of certain members of his flock, and he steadily declined to attach to them any of the hidden significance which Mrs. Kimbal's scornful eye detected in each new gift.

The church in Windham was only his second pastorate, and he was young, and very much in earnest. He had been persuaded to accept the call principally because he believed that here he had found a definite work waiting to be done. From the first Sunday that he had preached in the village, he had set his heart upon securing the erection of a new church to replace the present old, dilapidated structure. The scheme appealed to him strongly as offering an unlimited outlet for his energies, and as soon as he was settled, he set about the work enthusiastically.

Apparently his plan met with ready sympathy and encouragement on every side. The more influential men of his congregation, whom he approached first, listened to him attentively, and urged him to call and talk the matter over more thoroughly. Meanwhile, all the services of the church were well attended, and the outlook for success appeared most gratifyingly bright.

But subtly and by degrees a conviction seemed to have insinuated itself among his congregation that one of the very qualifications which had at first recommended him to their favor was, perhaps, after all, proving somewhat of a drawback. It began to be quite generally felt, and was even delicately hinted, that a bachelor clergyman's usefulness was necessarily limited. Several kind, motherly ladies, who were possessed of daughters or nieces of a

marriageable age, admitted to him (confidentially) that they sighed whenever they thought of the loneliness of his life in that great parsonage. One or two even playfully remonstrated with him — there were so many sweet, sensible girls in his congregation who were in every way fitted to be ministers' wives.

The Rev. Gilbert Bancroft was at first puzzled, then disconcerted, and finally genuinely annoyed at this solicitude shown on his behalf. He found it humiliating to admit that the interest and enthusiasm which he honestly believed he had succeeded in arousing in the building of the new church were, in reality, only the thin cloak to various sentimental schemes for inveigling him into matrimony against his will. His young confidence and belief in his congregation were severely shaken, and he passed through a period of marked depression and discouragement, which Mrs. Kimbal noticed with an experienced eye.

"He's beginnin' to find out what they're a-drivin' at," she mused, "an' he's tryin' not to have any un-Christian thoughts agin' 'em, poor man. Seems as if they was afraid they wasn't a-gettin' their money's worth — hirin' a single man."

At first Mr. Bancroft had thought to put an end to these embarrassing suggestions by announcing firmly that he did not intend to marry. But he was baffled and enraged to observe that this was indulgently regarded merely as the first step in his inevitable surrender. There was no apparent abatement in the futile schemes to ensnare him, and he continued to find himself an unwilling, but outwardly courteous guest, at tea-tables graced by the presence of some demure and blushing village maiden whose virtues and accomplishments were sure to be made the subject of many a covert allusion for his benefit. The hearts of his parishioners were evidently set upon his marrying, and they could give their attention to nothing else. The new church, in the minds of the ladies at least, was a secondary consideration, and could very well afford to wait.

The thought of failing in this, his first ambitious undertaking, was intolerable to him, but after six months of unavailing protest he found himself reduced to a state of unholy exasperation, and realizing that his patience was exhausted, he determined to seek refuge temporarily in flight. And so, having secured an old-time

friend of his seminary days to occupy the pulpit during his absence, he arranged with the committee of the church to be away from Windham for three weeks.

The departure occasioned considerable surprise, and a number of theories were advanced to account for it satisfactorily — the most complacent and widely credited being that he had gone away to get the ring. No one felt exactly in a position to supply particulars, but a feeling of pleased expectancy spread through the village. There were so many vacant third fingers upon which that ring might fittingly be placed ! Gossip and speculation increased as the time for his return drew near. A sensation was confidently expected.

And it came.

The unguessed truth burst with the paralyzing suddenness of a bomb among the startled congregation. The Rev. Gilbert Bancroft had been married quietly, and was bringing home his bride!

The news was received with mingled feelings of incredulity and dismay. No one could quite explain how the report had started. It seemed to have originated spontaneously from the very air, and Mrs. Kimbal was appealed to on all sides for confirmation. Scant satisfaction, however, was to be obtained from her. She would neither affirm nor deny.

"Anyway, it's just what you've all been a-hopin' an' a-prayin' for, ain't it ?" she demanded. "I wouldn't be so upset about it, though, if I was you. It don't look just orthodox — bein' so surprised to find your prayer's been answered."

Mrs. Saxton voiced the general opinion of the flock when she replied that if a minister made up his mind to marry "it seemed hardly necessary for him to go outside his own congregation."

"It wasn't necessary," Mrs. Kimbal admitted, "Land no! But why do you 'spose I sent to the city when I got my new alpaca three years ago — 'stead of buyin' it here to the store ? Because they didn't keep the line of goods I was lookin' for. So it ain't surprisin', is it, he should feel the same ?"

A few days later all doubts were set at rest when, just at dusk, an unfamiliar covered carriage, with a large trunk strapped behind, clattered up the village street, and stopped before the parsonage gate. The Rev. Gilbert Bancroft alighted, and then, turn-

ing, lifted out a slender, girlish figure, stylishly gowned in black and wearing a heavy veil. The two passed slowly up the walk, beneath the searching gaze of half the village, the lady leaning heavily upon her husband's arm. Mrs. Kimbal met them in the hall, the trunk was brought in, then the door closed, and the carriage drove away.

The village gasped.

The following Sunday all Windham attended morning service. But its curiosity was destined to go unsatisfied. The Rev. Gilbert Bancroft entered the church alone, and made his way composedly into the pulpit. His eager congregation could scarcely wait for the benediction to be pronounced before they crowded about him, congratulating and exclaiming. All the ladies, it appeared, had expected to see the bride at church.

He met all inquiries with his usual reticence. There had always been something in his manner which checked inquisitiveness, and it was felt more strongly than ever now. He thanked them pleasantly. Yes, it had all been very sudden. Still, he had felt sure that his congregation would approve heartily of the idea if they had known. But Mrs. Bancroft was very frail, and would have to be allowed to do good in her own way. He had brought her to Windham only on the condition that she might be sure of the same absolute quiet in which, for the last few years, she had been compelled to live. He hoped she might exert a great influence for good, but would beg the ladies to excuse her from receiving calls.

The flock withdrew, baffled and a little over-awed.

During the next few days, however, in spite of the request, several well-meaning ladies insisted upon "just running in" to see their pastor's wife. But they were met by Mrs. Kimbal and the unchanging announcement that Mrs. Bancroft begged to be excused. No one succeeded in penetrating the impregnable wall of privacy which seemed to hedge her in. Occasionally, just at dusk, she might be seen through openings in the shrubbery, pacing slowly up and down the walk before the house, leaning on her husband's arm. She was always trimly gowned in unvarying black with a white shawl thrown about her shoulders. She was very stately, with abundant brown hair, and in the twilight looked noticeably pale.

These infrequent and distant glimpses of their pastor's wife were all that the congregation were able to obtain. As time went on she took no part in the church work and attended none of the services. Her existence became the mystery of the quiet village life. Young Mr. Bancroft was dexterously plied with questions on all sides but he parried them as skilfully, with that guarded manner now become habitual.

Mrs. Kimbal's invariable reply was pithy — and almost belligerent:

"I can't see as folks has any reason to complain. She married him, didn't she? — not the deacons an' the whole congregation."

One determined effort — and only one — was made to storm the lady's resolute seclusion. Placid Deacon Saxton was chosen for the task. Having been carefully instructed and rehearsed by his wife, he made his way docilly up the grand path to the parsonage one evening when Rev. Mr. and Mrs. Bancroft could be seen taking their usual twilight promenade. At sight of the approaching figure the minister turned and led his wife to the far end of the walk. There he left her and returning greeted his visitor with challenging cordiality while the lady remained standing by a lilac bush, her graceful back half turned. Deacon Saxton, very much disconcerted by the unexpected coolness of his reception, stammered out his errand. But before he had half finished he was cut short by an indignant exclamation from Mrs. Kimbal who sped past them from the house. The lady by the lilac-bush lay prostrate on the grass.

Mr. Bancroft sprang to her side, peremptorily waving back the Deacon who, thoroughly appalled at the disastrous consequences of his intrusion, beat a hasty retreat through toward the gate. There, glancing back, he could see the unconscious, black-clad figure being carried tenderly toward the house.

Instead of being solved, the mystery had only deepened. Even the twilight promenades were now abandoned and no glimpse was caught of Mrs. Bancroft during the Fall or Winter. After many fruitless efforts village curiosity was, for once, obliged to admit itself completely baffled and the mystery was reluctantly left to Time, the great unraveller.

Meanwhile, the Rev. Gilbert Bancroft had been steadily at work raising money for the building of the new church. Since he had chosen to settle his own matrimonial future he had been free to pursue his scheme, unhampered by the halo of romance which had before surrounded him. Public interest had shifted temporarily from his own personality to his wife's and the former zeal of his congregation for church work abated somewhat. But he worked on steadily, his earnestness and perseverance carrying him through moments of discouragement and apparent failure until, at the beginning of Spring, he had accomplished the seemingly impossible — the money for the new church had actually been raised.

Then, one Sunday morning, he electrified his congregation by quietly reading his resignation. He felt, he told them, that his work in Windham was successfully completed, thanks to their own generosity. He had decided to accept a call to a larger church in a distant state where the opportunity for work was greater, for he was young, with a young man's ambitions.

In spite of the loyal protests of his congregation, he resolutely declined to reconsider this determination and during the next few weeks began the packing and shipping of his household goods. Although he made no mention of the fact in connection with his going, it was generally believed that Mrs. Bancroft's health formed the real reason for the change.

Would she leave Windham without meeting any of the members of her husband's church? This was the question which the village discussed with growing excitement as the day of departure drew near. But Mr. Bancroft made his hurried round of farewell calls alone and in response to covert hints and open inquiries merely expressed his regret that his congregation could not have had the pleasure of knowing his wife, but he begged them to believe that he would have arranged it if it had been possible. He should always remember his Windham friends most pleasantly.

"An invalid wife is goin' to be a terrible drag on him," Mrs. Saxton prophesied to her daughter, Milly, as they watched the slim, athletic figure striding down their front path to the gate. "But she ain't hindered him from doin' a grand good work here. We couldn't never have got the new church if it hadn't been for him."

The next evening the carriage which was to carry Rev. Mr. and

Mrs. Bancroft the three miles to the station, drew up before the parsonage, and later the whole village heard it when it drove away. Mrs. Kimbal remained over one more day to close the house, then she locked the front door, hung the key on its familiar nail in the woodshed and was carried off by the stage for a long visit with her brother's family in North Walpole.

The deserted house had a lonely look behind its screen of shrubbery as it stood awaiting the arrival of its next occupant.

Late one afternoon, nearly a week after the departure of the minister and his wife, Milly Saxton burst into the kitchen where her mother was preparing supper. Her shawl which had slipped from her shoulders streamed out behind her. Her eyes were wide with terror.

"Ma!" she gasped, clutching her mother by the arm. "Didn't Mr. 'n Mrs. Bancroft go last week? — didn't we hear 'em go?"

"Why, yes," said Mrs. Saxton blankly. "They were goin' to take that nine o'clock train at Derry. An' Em'ly Kimbal, she went next day."

"Well, Mrs. Bancroft's come back!" cried the girl hysterically. "She's up there at the house!"

"Oh, my land!" exclaimed Mrs. Saxton.

"I just ran up to peek in the window an' see if they'd taken all their things, an' when I put my face up against the glass there she stood lookin' at me in that empty room. I thought I was goin' to drop right where I was, but I just shut my eyes an' give one scream an' ran. It was awful!"

The girl dropped into a chair. Her mother stood looking at her for several minutes. Then she threw her apron over her head and went to the kitchen door.

"Ezra!" she called, "Ezra! Just you step here a minute."

Deacon Saxton appeared with an empty milk-pail in each hand.

"I want you should come up to the parsonage along with Milly an' me. Mrs. Bancroft's up there. Somethin's wrong or she wouldn't have come back."

Deacon Saxton followed his wife unquestioningly as she led the way across the yard and up the street and turned in at the parsonage gate. Milly, pale and frightened, brought up the rear. Mrs. Saxton scuttled around to the woodshed and, returning with the

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key, handed it to her husband. He unlocked the door and they entered the bare, forlorn-looking hall.

"She's in the parlor!" Milly whispered shrinkingly.

The two women stood huddled close together as the Deacon tiptoed over to the parlor door and pushed it open, gently. There by the mantel stood Mrs. Bancroft, slenderly erect in her black gown, the white shawl falling about her shoulders.

"Beg pardon, ma'm," said Deacon Saxton, retreating abashed, and pulling off his hat.

The lady stared immovably out of the window with her pretty, colorless face. There was not a quiver of her stylishly-clad figure. With a gasp Mrs. Saxton brushed by her husband. She crossed the room and caught hold of the white shawl — then she leaned back weakly against the mantel-piece. The power of speech seemed suddenly to have forsaken her.

"There ain't any real Mrs. Bancroft," she said at length, dully. "There hain't never been. She's just one of them wire figgers, with a wax head, they have in stores."

Her bewildered gaze encountered a piece of white paper pinned upon the sleeve. She unfastened it with trembling fingers and crossing over to the window, read it aloud by the fading light. It was in Mrs. Kimbal's handwriting.

> I promised the minister I'd burn up "Mrs. Bancroft" before I went away. But I couldn't seem to do it, nohow. She was all my idea, and the minister he didn't like deceivin' folks — *but he was drove to it*, poor man! If it hadn't been for her he couldn't never have raised the money to build the new church, and there's so many match-making folks in Windham its going to be a lesson to them to know the truth.

Mrs. Saxton's eyes travelled consciously from the immovable figure by the mantel to where Milly stood beside her father in the doorway.

"Em'ly Kimbal never spoke a truer word!" she said.

The Engineer and the Pilot.*

BY NATHANIEL DICKINSON.

PATTERSON leaned out over the low rail of the gangway-port and surveyed the river above. It was black, as black as the pall of the sky above it, as black as the grime on the engineer's hands, as the frown on his dark face and the mood which caused it whenever the picture of the dapper young pilot, in his natty blue uniform and black-visored cap, on the upper deck, passed before his mind and stirred afresh the hate which lay smouldering in the depths of his soul.

There was something soothing, then, in the very anger of the elements to the engineer of the *Sayville*. The startling, vivid whiteness of the white-caps which here and there showed their teeth against the black-green of the river, the dull glow of red, half-way up the northern horizon, which marked the track of the coming storm, and the yellow-white glare of the twisting lightning which played against the inkiness in the northeast were all akin to his mood, and strangely comforting.

"We'll get it," he prophesied gloomily to himself, "and it looks like hell-fire," he vagarized, and then fell to wondering what hell was like, and if it could be any worse than his present existence.

For Patterson was in love, and only this morning he had discovered the full metes and bounds of this passion and the other great one — Hate. For the one he was indebted to a certain girl whom he had known but a month; for the other to the young pilot of the *Sayville*, whom he had known for years.

That it was all his own doing, this present condition of affairs, did not tend to ease his hate, or his love. Two weeks ago he and Bolton, the pilot, had been friends, and harmony reigned between the engine-room and the pilot-house. Then, in a moment of that

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foolish confidence which lovers have, he had taken the pilot to call on the girl he was to marry, and this had been the beginning of the end as far as the rough engineer was concerned, for the pilot's hands were not grimy, and his voice was low and pleasant, and well in keeping with his good-looking face and active figure, and then, too, conscience and love are sworn enemies, and the girl was not without her charms. So, from a friend of both, the pilot became a friend of each, which is vastly different in such cases, and a coolness grew between him and Patterson, for his visits became too frequent, and were too obviously welcomed for the engineer to pass unnoticed.

But Patterson's pride was of a nature which kept him silent, and in silence the coolness grew between him and the girl he loved and his old friend, Bolton. And then, this very morning, had come the inevitable. When he had gone to say good-bye to his promised wife, he found her in the little garden he had grown so to care for, in the arms of another man — Bolton.

Something had seemed to snap in him, then, for he had stopped in his tracks with an expression almost of horror in his eyes. He was too dazed to be angry then. It was the going of his faith in woman and in man, and his simple mind needed time to digest this perfidy.

The girl had sprung from the arms of her new lover with a cry of alarm, and he stood ready to fight for his very life with the man he had wronged, for there was that in the other's eyes which was not good to see.

But the big engineer had slowly passed his huge hand across his eyes, turned and walked out the gate and down the street again. There was something terrible in this — more so than if he had vented his rage then and there, and it hung over the two and their clandestine love like a cloud, making her fearing instead of loving, and him strangely awkward.

Now, the cloud had passed from Patterson's brain and left him with one clear thought, and that the desire to kill. Anger which stirred him to the very depths swept over him in waves from time to time and grew on him as he dwelt on his great wrong. Beads of perspiration which were not the result of the temperature of his engine-room stood out on his forehead, and now and then in a sane

moment he felt, with a queer sub-consciousness, that his nails were driven into his palms and that every nerve in his whole body was tingling.

The jingle of bells in the engine-room called him back to the present and his post. He cast a last look at the black thunder-storm, and went back to his engine as though he had said a last good-bye to this world.

. . . . . .

When the *Sayville* cast off her moorings at six o'clock and swung away from her dock, the rising storm had already brought night down over the river, and the dull red in the north had faded in the approaching rain.

Up in the pilot-house they had called for full speed in spite of the narrow channel, in the hope that the steamer might run away from the storm, as might well have been the case had this storm, as many other thunder-storms, been localized within a radius of a few miles. But they were in its track, and but a few miles down-stream it overtook the *Sayville* and swept her decks from stem to stern with a deluge of driving rain.

Down among his throttles and levers Patterson received the signal to slow down to half-speed. The pilot had rung that bell, he knew, and to the wild-eyed engineer there was a subtle mockery in it that awoke afresh the rage in him, that his work had for the time driven out. For a moment he stood motionless, hesitating whether or not to obey the signal and then, his reason coming back to him in a measure, he slowed his engine down.

But a thought had come to him with this hesitation — a thought that widened his eyes and made his head feel strangely light, for it came to him that there was a place on the river, where, if he had hesitated even this short time, it might have meant the death of those in the pilot-house, and this was at the draw-bridge which spanned the river five miles below at Middleburgh.

The draw-men on this and the crew of the steamer were sworn enemies. Time after time the draw had been swung so tardily that the *Sayville* had to back at full speed to save crashing into it. Once, even, the steamer's forward deck had swept under the slowly swinging draw, and for a fascinating minute the huge structure had hung before the scared faces of those in her pilot-

house as her reversed engines held her and then slowly backed her away from danger.

This incident had cost one draw-man his position, but another as inimical had come, and the feud waxed stronger, until of late it had come to be the custom rather than the exception for the *Sayrille* to have to back her engines on entering the narrow channel between the island above the bridge, and the left bank, before the slowly opening draw.

This Patterson knew and counted on in his plan for revenge, and now he blessed these same draw-men as he had often cursed them, down in the bowels of the steamer, and waited all too impatiently in the delirium of his black hate for the time to come when he should know by the signals that they were approaching the bridge. What did it matter to him that with the guilty the innocent might be murdered? What mattered it to him that he was imperilling the lives of two hundred, passengers and officers and crew of the steamer? He had but the thought for one thing, and that was the death of the pilot.

. . . . . .

In the pilot-house all was dark but for the shaded binnacle light. Bolton stood at the wheel. At his right hand was the mate, at his left, one of the quartermasters. Far down the river, the lights on the drawbridge twinkled red and green and white in the dark night, and the pilot breathed a sigh of relief, for the river widened below this, and it had been a wild trip through the storm, with the flashes of lightning flooding the river in brilliant light one moment and leaving it in darkness so intense the next that he could not see the forward deck below him.

But now the rain had ceased, and the thunder rumbled in the distance. The river lay black velvet through which the steamer softly crowded her way. Yet the banks were distinguishable now, for the channel had narrowed between the island, in the center of the stream at this place, and the left bank of the river.

The lights on the bridge grew, and out of the night its huge framework took form like some Titan net spread to catch the steamer. They were but a hundred yards from it now. "Give her the whistle," ordered the pilot, and the quartermaster pulled the cord and sent a hoarse blast out over the river, which sounded

like the bellow of some huge leviathan, and died away in many echoes among the hills on either side of the stream.

But the lights on the bridge did not change. A bar of light from the steamer's searchlight threw the dripping structure into sudden daylight, and played along the draw, searching each nick and corner with its brilliant rays and sending a path of light down the dark river beyond. Then and only then the men on the draw tardily started to swing it.

The mate swore volubly, for the current ran strong here and even at half-speed the steamer was sweeping down on the draw at the rate of some ten knots.

"Stop her and back her!" he ordered abruptly. Bolton gave the signals, and all three waited expectantly, anxiously. The vibration of the engines ceased, and for a moment the big river-boat glided on in stately silence.

And then, with the structure of the bridge towering but the steamer's own length before it, came the vibrations again, and the *Sayville* seemed fairly to leap forward, with her engines running at full speed ahead!

For a moment the men in the pilot-house were startled out of speech and action and then, with an inarticulate cry, the mate snatched the bell-cord from the pilot's hand and pulled it furiously. But still the engines pounded ahead at full speed. The steamer's forward deck swept under the draw, which had swung but a few feet, and the towering mass of the bridge loomed before the pilot-house. "Hell!" cried the mate and, his courage deserting him, he flung the pilot-house door open and sprang out, the quartermaster close on his heels.

Bolton, alone, stood at his post. Whatever else his faults, he had the courage which makes heroes. He knew now. It came to him all in a moment, — Patterson's treachery and its cause. In a way, he told himself, he was responsible for the lives of the passengers, of the officers and crew of this boat, for had it not been for him, all this would not have happened. And yet, as he faced death, a last wistful thought of what might have been came to him as the face of the girl passed before his mind's eye in that kaleidoscope of impending dissolution which comes at such a time.

For a moment he stood thus, and then it seemed to him that

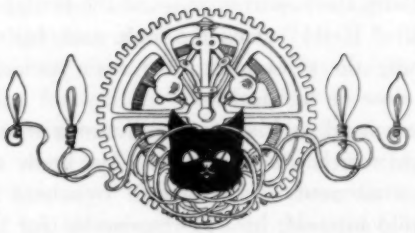
the mass before him was hurled at his head. He ducked, instinctively. Then came a rending crash, a shudder ran through the steamer, and he was hurled to the deck. As he lay half-stunned he saw the dark mass of the bridge sweep over him, saw the deck-house swept before it like paper, and the big funnels bend and crash to the deck below, and then he saw that the black sky was above him again, and realized that he was still clinging to the wheel, and this, with its strong bracing, had protected him from the deck-house, which had gone to pieces on it. He put it hard over and headed the wreck for the soft bank.

. . . . . .

So Patterson, the engineer, did not gain his wish after all. But that was Bolton's last trick at the wheel. His life had been spared, but his nerve had gone forever.

Down in the engine-room they found a raving maniac where once had been the best engineer on the river.

And the third actor in this tragedy — the girl who was to marry each in turn? She is the wife of another.



The Closed Door.*

BY EVELYN SNEAD BARNETT.

HE was a tramp and worse — an unkempt fellow with a roguish, though not unhandsome face and, though his deeds were many and nefarious, there was a plausible something, the very ghost of innocent boyhood about him, that made judges weak and juries lenient.

One day while prowling round citizens' back premises, he strayed to the rear of a church and, seeing a door ajar, looked in, to find himself at the back of a choir, facing a large congregation. As he paused with curiosity, he heard the minister say in his sermon:

"The door is closed!"

This so tickled the tramp that he opened the door wider and stayed a minute or more looking at the lines of well-dressed people listening in decorous comfort to the young minister. And the tramp actually sighed and his features twitched oddly until eyes and nose and mouth seemed to meet; for, somehow, the picture carried him back to his early home. In fear at the vision he drew back and slipped away, past the choir door to another open door at the end of the narrow hallway.

First peeping to make sure the room was empty, he went in. A fire crackled in the grate and in its comforting warmth the trace of tenderness vanished, leaving the hardened rogue scanning the well-furnished room with alert eyes.

Upon a desk lay some brown, gold-lettered, pasteboard boxes. Cutting them open with a convenient penknife, he brought forth various moneys, which he did not stop to count but tied in a dirty rag evolved from the intricacies of other rags.

All this time he could hear the words of the sermon.

"The door is closed," repeated the minister.

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"That's your third whopper," said the tramp, turning the knob of a large closet, "for this is the third door I've found open."

Inside the closet were vestments — surplices, cassocks, stoles — which the man examined in evident disappointment. But he brightened as he fingered a handsome, new overcoat. He put it on. How soft and warm it was! He strutted before a mirror and started in surprise at the change wrought by the single garment.

"Jee-rusalem! What a fit! Why it's almost like old times!" And again came that uncomfortable softness. What ailed him? Suppose, instead of gambling and drinking and breaking his mother's heart, he had been content with the plodding, stay-at-home life? He might to-day be like that young minister.

Here he had to grin at the mental picture of himself in white gown and embroidered stole; but on top of the grin he swallowed hard and told himself sternly that he was homeless and hungry and could not afford any high-toned ideas.

The mental picture, aided by further discoveries in the closet, suggested something else. Quickly shedding the overcoat and the rags beneath, he took a black clerical suit from a hook and put it on; then he added a silk hat, gazing in the glass all the while in chuckling satisfaction.

"Decent? Well, I should smile." But just then, getting a glimpse at his shoes, his jaw dropped. His feet, bursting through old leather, would be sure to attract attention and perhaps land him in a place he wished to avoid.

"Wonder where's his shoes?" said the rummaging tramp.

There were none to be found, and time was flying; though, as long as he could hear the steady flow of the sermon, he judged he was safe. Finally a pair of goloshes by the side of an umbrella settled the difficulty, and so, putting them on and buttoning his new overcoat to the chin, he was about to tiptoe out, when a handsome leather suit-case offered a last unresisted temptation.

In the street our newly ordained friend felt a strange timidity. In his short career he had acted many rôles, but this was untried. When he realized the probabilities of his action he was scared. He told himself he was too brash — that he was smart enough to know better, and here he had gone and sent himself to the Pen — it was all the fault of that church and those rows of respectable

people. And here he swaggered and whistled a lively air to revive his courage.

But just then a lady came by and the sight of a parson doing a jig in the street on Sunday so transfixed her in open-mouthed surprise that it quickly brought him to a sense of the incongruity between clothes and actions.

"Rick Jackson, I'll beg you to remember that preachers have to mind their p's and q's," he said, straightening up.

As he wished to leave the scene of his thefts in short order, he boarded a street car, and when a number of persons alighted in front of a hotel he did the same. In a former attack of respectability he had been a bell-boy, so he was at home in hotels. Having an unusual yearning for water, he sought the dressing-room to wash his face.

Here was also a good chance to examine his spoils, so he bolted the door and opened his valise. It contained these things:

A clean surplice, a black stole, a silk cap, a pair of embroidered forget-me-not slippers, several pairs of socks, one suit of woolen underwear, two clean white shirts with clerical collars, two white neckties, a hair-brush and comb, a tooth-brush, a Bible, a Prayer-book, a card-case filled with cards engraved "The Reverend Carolus Ewell," and lastly an envelope containing a railroad pass to New York and return.

As he realized its value the thief gasped: "What a find! This will carry me hundreds of miles away from the cops. Parson Jackson, you are about to take a vacation, d'ye hear?"

Then he revised his hasty toilet. He washed face, hands, hair; he put on a white shirt and tied a white cravat with a smirking flourish. So pleased was he with results that he could hardly leave the mirror.

Next he counted his cash — ten dollars and forty-four cents, mostly in nickels and pennies — and never a thought gave he to the self-denying children who had gathered it. Then, taking a last look, he decided that the only thing lacking was a shave.

Avoiding the shop in the house, he sought one in the street. The negro barber was obsequiously polite. He lathered, he cut, he clipped, he brushed, he dusted — but he was finally through.

When Rick asked the cost he was told:

"Nothin', sah; we never makes no charge to preachers gittin' shaved on Sundays."

Rick thanked him courteously, and passed out reflecting.

He made his way to the station, and, consulting a time-table, learned that a through train left for New York in half an hour. When the time was up he joined the crowd and entered the gate, pass in hand.

It was a ticklish moment, and Rick held his breath. The guard gave man and pass a hasty look. "All right," he nodded, and Rick had to repress further inclination to caper.

"That precious slip of paper," he thought, "Now remember, sir, you are the Rev. Carolus Ewell, and until you get to New York you have to travel in style and toe the mark."

He approached the sleeper. "Number, sir?" demanded the conductor.

"A berth, please," said Rick softly.

"Here you are, number seven. No, don't pay now — come round and c'lect after we start."

So far so good, but our traveller sought his seat in trepidation, keeping mighty quiet. But when the train moved and each moment carried him farther away from danger his assurance returned.

The conductor came to collect for the berth.

"What's the score?" asked the parson.

"Regular price five — but for you two-fifty — new rule."

"At last we have struck a perfesh with some pickin's," thought Rick, as he paid. "Free shaves, free tickets, and half-fares. Whew! The only thing lacking is a good, solid dinner, and I won't ask for no preacher's prices neither, if I can just get it quick."

This last need was not long unsupplied, for soon the dining-car was ready and, with the more gentlemanly of his fellow-travellers as models, and a draft on memory, our friend ate somewhat as a clergyman should. Several of the passengers tried to talk with him, but he answered in monosyllables, for it had been many a day since he had spoken their language, and he was afraid of self-betrayal.

Every one treated him courteously. He who had been kicked,

cuffed, and "moved on" — who for months had seen warmth and comfort and brightness only from the outside, now found himself the object of respectful attention. Truly, the door had opened wide!

As the hours passed he became more accustomed to his sudden rise in the social scale, and words and phrases of well-taught boyhood recurred to his memory. The ease with which he had changed his identity begot confidence — evidently there was nothing in his appearance to breed suspicion. To be sure, those rubber goloshes looked a trifle odd, and how they did draw!

As soon as possible he had his berth made up and, sliding behind the curtains, removed the painful overshoes; then, raising the window, he dropped his worn-out shoes into the flying darkness. In his eyes no luxury ever equalled that bed in the sleeping-car.

"And to think it's my own fault that these things ain't mine honestly!" was his last conscious reflection.

In the morning he awoke, vigorous and fresh, put on the forget-me-not slippers and rang his bell.

"My shoes, porter, please."

"Shoes, sah? Ain't seen no shoes o' yourn."

"Indeed! I put them out last night." Which was true.

"Did you, Boss? I must er skipped 'em." But vigorous search failed to bring them to light.

The porter was distressed. "I'm honiss, Boss, but somebody muss er stole 'em, an they'll suspeck me. If you jess won't raise er row — "

The appeal struck a responsive chord. "Well, well," replied the parson, "It's awkward, as I haven't another pair with me, but I suppose I can wear slippers for the rest of the trip, so mum's the — ahem! — we'll say no more about it."

In the night several passengers had been added and one of them, a beautiful young girl in a velvet hat with shading plumes, attracted the parson's attention. She was alone and evidently unused to travel, for she glanced nervously about. There was something so appealing in her fragile beauty and changing color that Rick could not keep from staring. At a long stop he went outside to stretch his limbs, and when he came back to his seat his pretty neighbor had gone.

Shortly afterwards he was reading the paper when he felt eyes

fixed upon him. Glancing up, he saw behind the glass door of the private compartment a man's face framed in the oval. The face dodged his gaze, but not before he had seen upon it an expression that left no doubt in his guilty mind that his short dream was at an end.

"Run to earth," he ejaculated. "It was too good to last."

But in the extremity the man's blood rose, and he resolved not to yield without a fight. He even thought of taking a flying leap from the train, and went to the back of the car to reconnoitre. As he stood on the platform, trying to devise means of escape, he heard voices, and his enemy approached, accompanied by the porter. Rick had an innocent look that was his chief stock in trade. He tried it then as he looked the stranger square in the face.

"Boss," said the porter, "dis here gent wants to speak to you on pertikler business."

Rick stifled an impulse to seize the "gent" by the throat, and waited.

"I suppose you know why I want you?" asked the man, politely enough.

"I think I do," answered Rick, with equal courtesy, though his face was pale.

"If you will let us do the thing quietly and not cause any excitement among the passengers, you will find it to your advantage," said the stranger.

"If there's any excitement, you'll have to make it yourself," said Rick.

"Good! In about ten minutes we'll be ready, and nobody will suspect what we are up to." And, much to the parson's astonishment, his captor left him, though the porter, a great, strong fellow, remained.

"Curus business, Boss," remarked the darky. "With the train a-goin' a mile a minute, it's what might be called marryin' in haste."

The parson only half attended. He was too much absorbed in thought to understand the porter's words. Those that followed made him jump.

"You 'pears putty sober 'bout it, but you'll be fixed, you bet.

The perspective bridegroom have a fat pocket-book sho; he done gimme a five erready."

"What? What's that you say?" the parson stammered.

"I say Mr. St. John done gimme er fiver."

"You don't say so," the parson managed to utter. "I'm glad — why I'm just as glad as I can be!"

The porter had never met with such ready sympathy. Ministers were surely a good lot.

"See here, my friend," said this one, thinking like a flash, "go to that young fellow and tell him I said yes too soon. I'll have to think about it."

As the porter disappeared the parson deliberated. "Rick Jackson, I wonder if you dare? The risk is awful, but a fee will be mighty neat."

He went back into the car and returned with the prayer-book, and, after some delay, found the marriage ceremony.

"It's plain; it's short. I've heard it a hundred times. I've a mind to try. Let's see," studying the rubric, "I must have a license. I'll make a point of that."

He was reading when the porter and Mr. St. John came back.

What's wrong?" asked the latter.

"Lots of things," answered the parson. "In the first place, I can't marry you without a license."

Mr. St. John smilingly produced a paper. "As long as we are in this State, this document is good," said he, triumphantly.

Rick took the paper and examined it, frowning critically. It was the first of its kind he had ever seen, but he said:

"It seems to be O. K. You see I have to be careful. If there should be anything wrong, and as you are a stranger to me I have no way of telling, and it should come out later, it — it might even cost me my place."

"If such a thing should happen," cried the gentleman, "I'll see you don't starve before you find other means of support."

The parson, ignoring the trace of contempt in this remark, replied pompously, "In that case I consent. Shall I follow you?"

Mr. St. John led the way to the drawing-room of the sleeper, where a young girl was waiting, whom Rick recognized as his pretty neighbor in the velvet hat.

Half frightened the young thing was, and solemn, as she raised her innocent eyes to the parson's, with a look of reverence that made him turn away his head with a gulp.

"I hope it's all right," he said, with a shrinking that surprised himself. And the bridegroom whispered:

"Her father is a selfish old fellow who expects her to waste her young life attending to his whims."

"Am I doing wrong?" pleaded the girl. "My father doesn't really need me, and twice has — Oh, I can't say anything against him! But I believe — I feel sure that I am not necessary to anybody's happiness but Mr. St. John's," and she had to struggle to control her tears.

Rick Jackson's head swam. Here was an innocent thing asking his advice, looking up to him as if he were good. How he wished he were good! What wouldn't he give to be a real parson right now. Then he bit his mustache nervously, for he seemed to hear that minister saying:

"The door is closed."

With a start he brought himself back to the present. The door *was* closed. He would go ahead and get that fee. It was too late to turn back now. He opened the prayer-book at "Dearly beloved," and read through the paragraph haltingly. Then he began:

"I require and charge you both as ye shall answer at the dreadful Day of Judgment when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed," — The words seemed to burn his lips. The book fell heavily to the floor.

"I can't," he groaned. "With her looking at me that way, I can't do her a wrong." Then, as both seemed astonished, "Do what you will with me — her eyes draw the truth — I'm no minister — it's only clothes. Get somebody else to marry you. I wish I could. Oh, what wouldn't I give to deserve her look."

"What's all this?" demanded Mr. St. John.

"I can't tell you before her. It would kill me. Come outside and you shall hear." And once more standing on the back platform, Rick Jackson made a clean breast of his life and the theft.

Edward St. John took him by the hand, and, full of pity and kindness, said:

"Do not despair, young man. You have a lot of good left in you still. I am going to help you open that closed door."

Before another sun had risen, two telegrams had been sent. One to a selfish old man said:

> Hildegarde and I were married by Bishop Delaunay in New York this evening.
>
> E. ST. JOHN.

The other went to the Reverend Carolus Ewell:

> Overcoat with valise and money returned to-night.
>
> RICHARD JACKSON.

In the valise was a letter:

> Rev. C. EWELL, *Dear Sir:*—
>
> I send back your overcoat and things — but the door isn't closed, as you said. It's open wide, and a good man has taken me in. You can do what you want with me, but, no matter what happens, I am going to try never to take anybody in again as long as we both shall live.
>
> Mr. St. John says it was the shirts, and something about the devil mounting to the belfry. I say it was your clothes and an angel in a velvet hat with feathers. The devil was me, and the belfry is a rising position with E. St. John & Co.
>
> Hoping you haven't missed your clothes much, and thanking you for the loan of them, I am your obedient servant,
>
> RICK JACKSON.
>
> P. S. — Remember I stand ready to face the music if you think I should.

But Rick Jackson has never been called to account for his last offence against the law.

Love's Immune.*

BY ALICE E. BROOKS.

CHESTER GORDON apparently enjoyed the character of Immune, and lived up to it to the best of his ability. He was invested with a certain repression and wearied indifference while in the presence of women, but with his own sex he was a jolly, companionable fellow. He was first-rate at any game — poker, polo, billiards, and even tennis with petticoats — sang a comic song, or a sentimental one, for that matter, distinctively well, and was no mean athlete. With all this society stock in trade — stuff attractive and altogether effective with women — he pointedly refused all dealings and congenialities with them. Should he occasionally be beguiled into a social function, it was with the air of a fellow being hanged against his will. His *insouciance* approached, yet never reached, the limit of rudeness — he seeming to possess the enviable faculty of pleasing without effort. Many a man, overflowing with desire to conciliate, has been condemned for a trifling *faux pas* which, in the manner of Ches Gordon, would have been ignored or dubbed a charming peculiarity. Thus one sins — another is canonized — yet both equally faulty. Prejudiced judges, these women — dual natures, angel and devil.

Gordon's bachelor apartments were marvels of luxury, worked out with the main idea of unfemininity. There were abundant decorations of pipes and rapiers, tomahawks and Navajo blankets, hunting scenes, horses and dogs — some of them genuine Bonheurs — busts of statesmen and ascetics, tobacco jars from all countries, cut-glass decanters, always full (a special attraction),— and many other devices that would preclude the possibility of any leaning toward the gentler sex, but rather confirm his distinctive title. Phrenologically speaking, his bump of Amativeness was

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abnormally developed; therefore, either Phrenology was radically wrong, or the Immune was sailing under false colors — was a fraud, and might, could, would, and should love a love of the most pronounced type. Any one of a number of women of his acquaintance was fully calculated to arouse such a passion, but some of them had worked to effect his subjugation with only the result of chasing him further into retirement. It would have been a possible benefit to have sealed him up in his selfish seclusion to meditate on lost opportunities — for he didn't seem to appreciate the fact that, in his three decades of existence, he might have flirted, married, and divorced — and flirted, married, and divorced again. Such neglected possibilities would doubtless prod him in his sere and yellow leaf, should his obstinate refusal of the gods' good gifts not punish him in his heyday.

"Chester, Miss Edgarly requested me to persuade you over to meet her friend — a lovely importation from Australia." I had just returned from the Edgarly box during an intermission in the L'Aiglon of the divine Sara. Chester raised his eyebrows, drew his thin lips together, and intently regarded his polished finger-tips. I waited.

"Confound it, Chester, eliminate that bored expression — their lorgnettes are leveled at us."

"Really," said he, provokingly unconscious.

"You are not obliged to go — nothing depends upon it," said I, nonchalently, endeavoring to cloak my eagerness — two pairs being, in this instance, better than a royal flush.

He glanced in their direction, at the same time bowing most graciously. Those were his tactics, indifference and courtliness, or rather a high-mightiness. He gave a quick second look, interested and admiring — a lightning change that could discount the profession. The transformation was not inspired by Miss Edgarly — she had exercised high art on him, fruitlessly — missed him and leveled me, and, happily for me, seemed well satisfied with the substitute. To my intense satisfaction, Chester arose at once and, with alacrity, accompanied me to the side of Miss Edgarly and her friend.

Chester was a goner.

Young Cupid got in some good work on short notice, attacking the redoubts of his enemy with shell, shrapnel, and canister —

beauty, smiles, and subtle flattery. The engagement was short and decisive, resulting in the prompt capitulation of the Immune — and, alas, that a truthful historian should be forced to chronicle it, the victor was a madam — either a widow, which was bad enough — or a wife, which was retribution out of all proportion to Chester's sins against love. Mrs. Lansdoune, wife or widow, was a charmer in face, figure, and manner. She knew all the lines, and there was no discounting her ability to manipulate them.

After the box incident Gordon was a changed man. From the grub was evolved the butterfly, fluttering where sunshine was brightest and flowers the sweetest. Society was courted assiduously, and our bachelor communing was a joy of the past. His every moment was devoted to pleasure — balls, routs, coaching-parties, boating, house-parties — anything and everything that could give him the coveted opportunity of being near Mrs. Lansdoune. The delight of association was mutual — they were affinities, made for each other, and all that. Mornings as well as evenings found him by her side. Charming in the perfection of a ball dress, she was a vision in the negligee of morning, so dainty, so picturesque — so altogether desirable as to tempt a man to smash any number of decalogues. Tracing the intricacies of Battenberg, her slim hands illustrated the poetry of motion, as the poising of a butterfly, or the flitting of an irridescent hummingbird. How tantalizingly tempting — so near, and yet so untouchable! Chester devoured her with his eyes — she innocently unconscious! Bah! she read him, through the down-dropt transparencies serving as eyelids, as with a searchlight. Conversation had lapsed into an eloquent silence, punctuated, now and then, by a few low-hummed notes in a sweet treble, and the click of the busy needle against the gold cap of her middle finger. The hiatus was ended by Chester:

"Golden-rod is gorgeous on the island. I was over yesterday. The earth seems gilded with it."

"Your selfishness is reprehensible. Van and I were wishing yesterday that we might go over. She says the island is an Eden, lacking only the Man and Woman." She darted one of her treacherously sweet glances at Chester.

"My yawl and I are always at your disposal. You have but to signify your wish and convenience." He was ready to engineer a balloon ascension had she expressed a desire.

"Let us go to-morrow. Get up a party, you dear, delightful man!" she exclaimed, all enthusiasm and childish delight. Artful or innocent, she was altogether fetching. Interlacing her white fingers and raising the fringes of her blue-gray eyes, she could enravish any sinner, and well-nigh a saint. Chester was not a saint. Ergo.

"And may I take you?" he asked, still performing the optical cannibalism.

"I supposed that understood."

"To be in Eden with Eve is as near heaven as I wish to be."

"Adam lost Eden," she said, suggestively

"On account of Eve," quoth the Man.

"On account of the Serpent," added the Woman.

"All things well lost for love," declared the Man, and seemed in no degree conscious of heresy.

"It is just possible for the modern Eve to manage things better, and be able to pre-empt a homestead with love included." She bent over her lace, intently examining the last spider-web as she threw the deliberate challenge. Arachne wove webs of divers designs.

From Chester's eyes flashed great darts of desire, love, adoration. He arose abruptly and went to a window outlooking to the island. After a moment Mrs. Lansdoune's childish voice clipped off the first syllable of his name.

"Ches — Mr. Gordon," — how naturally, how beautifully she could blush! — "what attracts?"

"Eden — but it seems so far away."

"Not twenty-four hours! But why yearn for Eden when you have Eve beside you?"

"Mrs. Lansdoune, you were surely sent for man's undoing." Taking her idle hand, he said in a concentrated voice, "To-morrow we will gather golden-rod and happiness together in Paradise."

A profound obeisance, and he was gone.

"How intense!" she yawned behind her lace-work. "He is a

first-rate actor, and could almost persuade one of his sincerity. Such flirtations are artistic and highly entertaining."

That night I cornered Ches in his apartments.

"Villain, at last I have thee!" I said, dramatically, as I entered his half-closed door.

"Come in, Manning," he said, without so much as removing the cigar from his lips. "Your chair is vacant and awaits you."

I sat down.

"Smoke?" He shoved the stand nearer to me. "New brand — think you will like it. In their smoke I see faces."

"H—m, yes. Men or women."

"A woman's," — with emphasis on the A.

"Of what type?"

"Mrs. Lansdoune's, of course," he declared shamelessly.

"Your attention to that lady is quite marked — people are talking."

"Let them."

"Is she wife or widow?"

After shifting his cigar to the corner of his mouth, and sending a series of fragrant rings floating upward, each, doubtless, framing a face, he replied deliberately, "I do — not — know."

"Do — not — know?" I exploded. "My God, man! and allowing yourself to love her?"

"I have not admitted such a fact."

"There 's devilish little need — it is self-evident."

He took his cigar between the middle and index finger, and with the little finger daintily flicked off a two-inch length of ashes, remarking inconsequently, "Langly's new mare is a wonder. Have you seen her?"

This to divert conversation.

"Yes," I snapped out, "but she isn't the only fast creature in sight." I thought that retort would rattle him — but it didn't.

"That 's so," he said, placidly ignoring my covert meaning. He was exasperating! "Sansen's horse is her equal as a trotter. I say, Manning, I came near forgetting a commission. A party of

us go boating to-morrow across to the island. You are expected to bring Miss Ruse."

"That 's a mean advantage to take of a fellow. I have a great admiration for Miss Ruse, but, don't you know, a fellow has his preferences."

"I appreciate the situation. Miss Edgarly, no doubt, deplores her duties as hostess, since they impose the loss of your society. She goes with her guest, a cousin from Yale."

"Ah! that puts a new face on the proposition, and I shall be delighted to accompany Miss Ruse. What is the programme?"

"The ladies covet the treasures of golden-rod on the island, so we go to levy tribute of its wealth. Walks — talks — lunch — love, and, perhaps, shooting the falls — who knows?"

"I am not ambitious to do any stunts. Possibly you intend to be star performer in the last-mentioned specialty," I said jokingly.

A strange expression crept over Gordon's chiseled features, as he said, "Should it fall to my portion, I will not hesitate."

We were standing. I laid my hands on his shoulders, and, looking into his eyes, said earnestly, "Chester, my dear friend, don't let this woman destroy you. Ascertain if she be widow or wife. If the first, win her if you can — if the last, break away — it means ruin."

"It is too late, for, wife or widow — I love her."

"Oh, damnation! — Good-night, Ches," I slammed the door, rushed down the stairs three at a stride, ran over a small street gamin at the door, and was appropriately blessed, which I generously rewarded, and came to my senses after a sprint of a half-dozen blocks.

Duly gathered the pleasure-seekers on the morrow. By eleven A.M. a dozen rowboats pointed their noses into the sloping sands awaiting the jolly party. Chappie Grant, believing himself authority on all things pertaining to water, from yachts to puddle-ducks, thought it in order to spiel a period upon the proper approach to the island — as if every shaver in our town had not been coached as to the dangers that lurked around that bit of terra firma.

"Those who manage the tiller" — he stood on a cracker-box, and looked nobby and nautical in white from cap to canvas shoes

— "will do well to land from midway to north of the Island. The meeting of the waters at its south end, just before reaching the falls, forms a whirlpool dangerous of approach. To the midway and north."

A cheer went up with a right good will. Porter Haddiman proposed a "vote of thanks to Ulysses II., who has saved his countrymen from destruction."

Seconded and passed.

One by one the boats shot out into the channel of the river, leaving a glittering trail behind them. With the current they drifted lazily down the stream in the warm September sunshine, a party of typical sybarites, with Chappie Grant in the lead — Chester Gordon and Mrs. Lansdoune bringing up the rear.

All being safely landed, and boats made fast to willows that fringed the banks, the young people at once began laying tribute of autumnal treasures. Golden-rod and marguerites and wild ageratum — branches of reddening sweet-gum — leaves of crimson bramble and gorgeously tinted persimmon, the gay Banditti accumulated. The first relish being satisfied, nooks and crannies were sought, where tender thoughts and friendly confidences were exchanged with poetical abandon. Miss Ruse being, at the last moment, unavoidably prevented from accompanying the party, I was relegated to the unenviable position of a solitary stag. The old ballad, "Two is company, three is none," rang in my head, and, leaving the crowd, I found a capital lounging-place at the foot of a gigantic oak upon a crag overhanging a grotto. I was soon blissfully unconscious. There were multiform reasons for my somnolence; to wit, the warm sunshine, the softly stirring leaves, the isolation — and, above all, late hours the night before. About half-awake, I heard voices below. Before I realized my position, I was up to my neck in undesirable certainty.

"Men are so tiresome." It was Mrs. Lansdoune's siren voice.

"You tempted me."

"How ungenerous! I believed you above crimination."

"But you do love me, Amina? It cannot be my fate to love but once, and that in vain," pleaded Chester.

"How well you simulate. One would almost believe you in truly earnest."

"I wish you to believe — believe that I love you — love you — love you!"

"But you mustn't — you know — really must not, Mr. Gordon."

"Do you think I can put my love on and off, as a garment? If it offend you, there is no help for it. You are the beginning and end of all my hope of happiness. Don't play with me, Amina, — it is too real. I know your heart is mine — you have assured me in a thousand sweet ways. Only let me hear it from your lips."

A little scream, half-suppressed, smote the air.

"You must not touch me — you have misunderstood me — I do not love you — it is all a mistake — I thought you meant a passing flirtation," fell from her lips with frightened accelerando.

"Flirtation? My God! woman, flirtation?"

"Yes — nothing more." Was that a sob?

"Amina, Amina, tell me there is nothing to banish hope?"

"There is — I am a wife — I thought you knew," she sobbed.

Softly, treacherously, as the Serpent's voice in Eden, fell the next words; "But, Amina, — if you love me!"

"But I do not — how can I make you understand? I do not! I have no thought for you, nor any one but dear old John."

A silence fell — not even the rustle of the leaves to punctuate it. How I wished to sneak away from my unhappy position, but it was too late. At last after some moments (or was it a century?) Gordon arose, saying: "Forgive me for any consequence that may follow this unhappy episode. You do not, yet, appreciate what it means for us. Come."

They walked off, and I was deucedly relieved.

Four numbers of the programme — walks, talks, lunch, love, — had been disposed of — the fifth bothered me. What if such a thing should happen! The thought kept bobbing up — and always associated with Gordon. I tried to read his face — no use, it was Sphinx-like.

Preparations for homegoing diverted my apprehensions. The boats were laden with the spoils of beauty — transient wealth — and each vied with the other in original decorations. Ches wove a coronet of ageratum and crowned Mrs. Lansdoune as Queen of the Banditti. How blue her eyes shone under the flowery circlet!

Gordon's face had lost its cold expression, and on it seemed to rest a tender pity — sorrowful, it struck me, in every line.

The position of the boats was relatively the same as at the start in the morning — Chappie Grant in the lead, Gordon in the rear. Ches was delayed in the start, and the party was some rods up-stream, when our attention was attracted by an exclamation from Grant.

"Look, Gordon is pulling for the falls!" The boats came to a standstill. Gordon raised his hat, and Mrs. Lansdoune gaily waved her handkerchief.

"Oh! let's go on," said Haddiman. "He wants to give Mrs. Lansdoune a glimpse of the whirlpool — a sight worth seeing."

The conjecture is plausible, and the oars click again in their locks, speeding the gay party homeward. I can not hush the suspicion within me, and dare not give it utterance — results may not justify it. Creepy with fears, I turn my boat down-stream. Ches plies his oars vigorously, though going with the current. His yawl seems to fly. He nears the meeting waters. "Take care, Gordon!" I cry, but my voice seems to go no further than my lips. Good God! how his boat trembles — it is caught by the eddying current — around it goes in a circle — he throws his oars into the pool — (Merciful Heavens, why can't I wake from this dream?) he catches the terrified woman passionately to his breast, her arms reaching out to me — a woman's voice skims over the waters — the boat shoots out at a tangent to the vortex and shivers on the crest of the falls.

Society called it a sad accident — I knew the truth.

The Man Who Went Back.*

BY VIRIDIAN GREENE.

IF you should ever go mirage-hunting from Yuba City out toward the Sutter Buttes, you would have the upper Sacramento on your left, wheat fields on your other side, and an amazingly dusty road under your feet. You would be pretty sure to find your mirage, if the sky and the time of day were right. I did, but that was not the end of my finding — in a camp at the foot of the Buttes nearest the river I found Fanshawe. And this is where my story should begin, as it never could have been told at all if I had not found him there and then, and had not happened on the very day of all days when it would have been the end of things, if he had not been found, and the beginning of Heaven knows what if he had.

For Tom Fanshawe was the man who went back. And I was the man who kept trace of him until he should return, if so be he could and would. Everybody who knew him knew these things, but not just in this way. That is why I am telling the whole story, and this is how I came by the right to tell it.

Seven years before I went mirage-hunting Tom Fanshawe and I had said our last words to a college commencement audience, taken a hurried flight to our Middle West former homes, lived and loved a little with our own people, made our farewells before the end of a month, and by the last day of another had put on miners' boots, shirts, and other manners in a mining camp near the headwaters of the Sacramento. Timbuctoo, they called it. "But why?" Missionaries never go there, and as for cassowaries ——.

How we lived in camp, how others acted toward us, and toward each other shall not be told by me. Not till you forget that there was once a Bret Harte. Besides, very little of the history of those years belongs to this tale. Enough it is, to say that we held by

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each other, took our share of ups and downs with the rest, kept out of the clutches of such villains as we happened to be attractive to, and started home at the end of the fifth year with a fairly comfortable bit of gold in our possession. But it was not gold that led us to these experiences, nor the acquirement of it that released us. It was life, as you shall hear.

These are all the facts that seem to have any bearing on this story. All, though afterwards I saw that one thing, had I known enough to heed it, might have changed matters greatly. Fanshawe often used to say to me when we were in bed in our cabin, especially on rainy nights, "Thomson," — Thomson is my middle name — "Thomson, I wish I had not left my mother so long; I know she is lonely."

I forgot that I had known one man, as big and strong as Tom, who had died of homesickness, and tried to comfort him with half-jesting, though kindly words. But in my heart I knew that I should never have left that mother, if she had been mine. She was the most beautiful woman I ever saw,— body, mind, and spirit.

One Sunday morning, after a stormy night of thrashing rain and roaring wind, Tom rose by candle-light to write letters for the weekly mail; half-asleep, I heard him moving about, looking for his pen and ink. "Get up, you log. I'm too homesick to live. Let's go home," he said.

"Write your letters, you infant, and let me alone."

It was broad daylight when Tom's hand on my shoulder waked me suddenly. "Oh, get up," he said, with anguish in his voice, and all the color out of his face, "something's wrong at home. We must start at once."

"What ——."

He interrupted excitedly, "I saw my mother, — she was here in this room. I saw her, I tell you. She stood just by the table where I was writing to her. I had just written, 'Oh, I want you, mother,' and she stood by me. As I live, she stood there. I saw the color of her eyes, the turn of her neck, her gray dress, the thin white stuff about her neck, — Oh, you remember how she looked," he cried, covering his face with his hands.

"You must have dreamed ——" I began.

"Don't," he wailed, "she is dead, and I whom she loved above

all else in the world, have left her alone all these years, and to die wanting me."

"No," I said, "I do not believe she is dead. I once had a friend who thought that she had had such a vision ——."

"'Thought' she had? I know what I have seen," he cried.

"Yes, yes, but this meant only sorrow, not death. When she went home, she found her father in sore trouble; it was her father she had seen. But we will go home to your mother, Tom. Come, let's begin at once to get ready."

"Do you mean it?" he said, trembling and flinging the tears from his face.

"I mean it. You will see."

Getting off was a matter of merely a few hours, thanks to our habit of keeping everything square between ourselves and others, as far as camp-etiquette permitted. We left for Marysville that afternoon.

As we neared the end of our journey overland, Tom grew more and more restless. "I wish I could go back to the time when I was fifteen, and leave out these years away from my mother. Oh, you don't know," he groaned, when I told him he was talking morbid nonsense. "You don't know."

"But you are going home," I said, "to be with her to the end of her life."

"Ah, to the end of her life." But his face was troubled.

"She has always been well, — always the most splendidly strong woman I ever knew, Tom."

"Yes, oh, yes." But he answered as if he hardly comprehended what I was saying.

On our arrival at the little country town near our homes, we hastened at once across the fields, and soon plunged into the thick grass of the blossoming orchard, through whose moonlit boughs we caught a glimpse of the home-porch. As I lingered to gather up Tom's traveling-bag, which he had flung down the moment he saw her, the happy fellow clasped his mother in his arms with the words: "Mother, mother, I will never leave you again. Life is not life without you."

"Other Son," said Mrs. Fanshawe to me next morning, — so she had always called me since my own mother had left me alone

in the world, — "Other Son, I am glad you have come home now. Do not tell Tom, but I have been ailing a little lately, which, as you know, is almost a portent for me, who am never ill."

"What is it?"

"An aching head, a dulness, nothing more. It may be the spring weather, so warm these few days. And you will stay with us? There is no one at your home now to need you. This is your home, you know."

"But let me bring a doctor, let me do something."

"No, no, it may be nothing, and it would alarm Tom needlessly."

Acquiescing, I resolved to watch for any signs of illness, and to speak to her son, if need be. The first week went forward happily enough, except for a sense of uneasiness on my part. Tom seemed to have forgotten all his forebodings. I never saw him happier. At the week's end there dropped out of a clear sky by way of the Mill Center stage-coach, a distant cousin of Isabel Fanshawe's, — Isabel Droone, by name.

"I had no place to go or — to be, Cousin Isabel," she faltered. "My mother — my mother said that when I was a little girl I looked like you, and that if she — that if I should be left alone — I should go to you. I am a teacher; I wrote first for the school here, and they have given it to me. But I want my own people to live with; will you have me, Cousin Isabel?" All this to us, astonished, on the porch one evening.

"Why, little Isabel! Why, why!" And Tom's mother led her in with kisses and tears. "I am so glad you have come; I needed you, I did not know how much, until now that I see you. Yes, you are like the picture I used to see in the looking-glass — very much."

No, I must not linger over those happy days, so soon over. What befell a little later has made them a painful memory. We waked one morning to find Mrs. Fanshawe ill with a burning fever, in heart-breaking delirium, unconscious of our presence. Tom hung over her in an ecstasy of grief, soothing her, tending her, never leaving her a moment.

Because human nature can endure far more than human nature thinks it can when it is not under stress, we endured those terrible

weeks as if we had had each the strength of ten. Tom was never tired, never sleepy, never hungry; he fought Death with alternate hope and despair. At the end of the sixth week the heart so sorely taxed with fever failed, and the mother's life departed.

I led Tom, unresisting, from his mother's bedside; he neither spoke nor wept, but dropped in a stupor on his bed, where he lay all night in a sleep from which I could not rouse him next day till noon, when he merely looked at me without recognition, and fell back into the same heavy slumber. When he waked again, it was without intelligence in his eyes, fever burning his body, and strange, gentle words flowing from his lips, as a child talking to his mother.

In all those stricken weeks which followed, Isabel Droone and I, and neighbors who came in to help us, heard day and night, whenever the dear boy did not sleep, the same questionings and answerings of a conversation directed toward his mother. There was no memory of illness or separation, no word of man's work or anxieties. Sometimes, in his most quiet moments, he seemed to be listening to some lovely story, and would say, "Oh, mother, tell me that again." Sometimes, "Sing me that song again, mother." Then he would sleep, and his talk would be of morning sights and sounds, duties and pleasures, when he waked again.

One mid-day, while Miss Droone stood looking down upon him as he lay in a death-like slumber, he suddenly opened his eyes, looked in her face, and said, "Why, mother, you are up early. I am lazy," made an effort to rise, smiled feebly, and fell asleep. We thought death had come, but he slept on for hours, and we held our breath in hope. At dusk he waked again, and asked for his mother; smiled when he saw Isabel, took some broth from her hand and slept again.

"Let him think so, then; his life hangs on the merest thread," said the old doctor, when Isabel had told him that Tom had mistaken her for his mother. "All depends now on what we can do and not undo in the next few hours, and days."

Weeks of convalescence brought Tom's big body well forward on the road to health, but a curious obsession held his mind to the very point where it had seemed fixed in his illness; he had gone back to his boyhood; he still thought Isabel Droone was his mother.

He seemed to have forgotten everything that had taken place since his fifteenth year. The interests of that time began to engage his attention. He had been very much occupied in his boyhood in making collections of birds and small animals.

He began to rummage among the remnants of his old museum, long since packed away in the garret. Later, he began to set traps and snares in the woods and by the streams, and renewed his correspondence with the British Museum and other institutions relative to the sale and exchange of specimens.

When Miss Droone went back to her school, he took his books and went with her; he seemed puzzled. Why should she teach? Hadn't they money enough? Oh, the people wanted her, there was so little to do at home, then she could be with him more of each day, and the school was small and easy and pleasant. Didn't he like her for a teacher? "Surely, mother."

The little neighborhood knew all about our singular trouble, and whether the children were naturally more thoughtful than the average, or whether they had special training on this point, or not, Tom's poor, shaken mind remained undisturbed by any inopportune words or hints. Isabel played her part wisely, but the strain was wearing on her more than I could bear to see. I worked and played with Tom, and watched him every hour of the day when he was not at school and safe under Isabel's care. We made short camping-trips to wooded districts near by to collect more specimens of this or that species already in his cases; we sat whole evenings in his re-fitted laboratory, classifying or labelling, as we had done when we were boys. One evening after school, he found a letter awaiting him from an English Zoölogical Society, asking him to go to California to collect for them some specimens of a certain rare species found near Marysville. The type specimen, they wrote, had been taken at the Sutter Buttes. Would he undertake to get them?

"He will go," said Isabel, as she told me of it, "and you will have to go with him; there is no other way, for the doctor says we must not oppose him in anything now."

No need to describe our journey; the time was filled with talk of genus and species, with Tanias, Spermophilus, and Pero — but not to particularize — with Tom's old enthusiasms about animals

as specimens. He could hardly wait to attend properly to getting his camp and collecting-stuff together, after our arrival at Marysville, he was so eager to be at work.

I held him in leash until we were fully ready, and set off with the impatient naturalist toward his collection grounds.

We had worked together a week in our locust-grove camp, skinning and stuffing, labelling and listing, and Tom was as happy as if he were indeed only fifteen. So absorbed was he that it seemed safe to leave him hours at a time, as I now often did on searches of my own.

One day after we had finished packing a box of specimens and Tom had laid out a full day's work for himself, in which I could be of no use, and at a time when I had begun to feel secure in his condition as showing no sign of change, I decided to spend the day some six miles distant to take observations on a mirage visible frequently from the place where we were. When I returned at dusk I found Tom asleep under a locust-tree in the yard. I saw that he had finished only about half of the work he had planned for the day, so that he must have been sleeping some hours. As I moved about the camp fire-place preparing to get supper, at some inadvertent noise of mine he turned over, sat up slowly as if still sleepy, "Hello, old fellow," I called out as I flourished a frying pan, "if anybody wants hot flapjacks now — "

But I was stopped by his look of bewilderment. "What's this? I must be asleep; can't you wake me? Where are we? What day of the month is it?"

What could I say? There was but one way to deal with a man like Tom Fanshawe. I told him that he had been sick, and that things were not all right with him when the fever had left him, that he had wanted to come out here and that it was thought that the change would ——

"But what does all this mean?" indicating the specimens.

"Oh, we've been trapping and hunting a bit, but let's have supper, and talk about things after."

I felt that all the wisdom of all the doctors could not have helped me here; there seemed to be nothing to do but wait. He would not eat, — said he wanted to think a bit, and sat with his head in his hands for more than an hour.